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ABSTRACT

This paper reports research studies on the determinants of children's helping of another child in distress. Effects of age and various environmental conditions were investigated. Experiments had a similar design: subjects were given a task and made aware that a child was alone in an adjoining room. The experimenter then left the room and subjects heard the child's distress sounds; sobbing and/or calls for help. In one study involving elementary school children, age and number of children in the group were the variables examined. A curvilinear relationship was found between helping behavior and age. Helping behavior increased from K to grade 2, but decreased from grade 2 to 6; sixth graders helping about as much as kindergarteners. Up to second grade, pairs of children tended to help more than individual children. In other experiments, 7th graders were given varied information about the permissibility of entering an adjoining room from which distress sounds would subsequently be heard. Children who received permission helped significantly more often than others. This finding suggests that society may overemphasize obedience. An experiment on learning helping behavior used kindergarten subjects to test variables of role playing, induction, and sex. The findings suggest that training in role playing may help children to learn prosocial helping behavior. (NH)

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Determinants of Children's Attempts to Help Another Child in Distress

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Paper presented at the symposium "Prosocial Behavior in Children: The Determinants of Giving and Helping". Meetings of the American Psychological Association, Washington D. C. September, 1969

This symposium represents a recent but already strong movement in psychological research toward the investigation of antecedents and correlates of behavior that aim to benefit others. This type of behavior often demands self-sacrifice from the actor: time, effort, material possessions, even the actor's personal safety may be sacrificed. The major theoretical conception of the last several decades was the homeostatic model, according to which man acts in order to reduce his own needs or to fulfill his own desires. In light of the increasing evidence for behavior that aims at benefiting others, an extension of this model becomes necessary which takes into consideration that other people's needs may result in a motivational state or some form of imbalance that leads to behavior that alleviates the needs of others.

In this paper research on determinants of children's helping of another child in distress will be discussed. We greatly value human life and the well-being of others--at least in principle we do. Consequently the willingness to help others in distress is generally considered, I think, of great importance. That this is so is suggested by the widespread indignation that followed the murder of Kitty Genovese, when 38 people witnessed her distress without attempting to help. Some of the experiments that will be reported here investigated the effects of age and various environmental influences on children's willingness to help another child in distress. Environmental conditions are likely to affect greatly the extent of helping behavior. Given the same need for help, when the apparent risk to the helper is great helping behavior is likely to be much less than when risk of danger appears slight. The word danger refers here to any negative consequences. On the other hand, determinants of helping that are internal to the individual are also likely to influence helping behavior. One experiment will be reported in which the

learning of helping behavior, or the acquisition of a disposition toward prosocial behavior was investigated.

The procedure used to evaluate helping behavior was highly similar in all these experiments. Subjects were brought into an experimental room, and their task was described to them. The task was either to make a drawing, or to fill out a questionnaire. Then, under some pretense, the experimenter left them alone in the room; either E forgot to bring along crayons so that she had to go to get some, or she pretended to have some work to do. Before leaving S, E went into an adjoining room to check on another child who she told the subject was in there. She soon returned, made some comment about the child in the adjoining room, and then left as she had previously said she would do. The procedure aimed to communicate that there was a child in the adjoining room and that she was alone, so that when Ss subsequently heard sounds of distress from the adjoining room they would not assume that someone was present with the distressed child who either had caused her distress or would help her. About a minute after E left, Ss heard a crash and sounds of severe distress from the adjoining room. The distress sounds varied somewhat from experiment to experiment; they always included a crash followed by severe crying and sobbing, but sometimes they also included calls for help, and information as to what had happened and what kind of help was needed such as cries of "Help, help, the ladder has fallen on my foot"...and later, "Please someone help, someone take the ladder off my foot!" The length of these distress sounds varied from 70 to 100 seconds. The experimenter observed children's reactions to these sounds of distress from behind a one-way mirror. Some subjects went into the adjoining room from which the distress sounds came. A few children left the room through the door through which E had left; in such cases E met them and they reported to her the events in the adjoining room. Both of these acts were categorized as <u>active help</u>. If the children did not actively help E returned to the room about a minute after

the distress sounds were over. Another form of helping behavior was a report by Ss at this time that something had happened to the child in the adjoining room. This behavior I will refer to as volunteering information. If Ss neither helped actively, nor volunteered information, their behavior was categorized as no help. However, E attempted to elicit information about the distress sounds by asking Ss the following questions: Was everything all right while I was gone? If Ss answer was in the affirmative, E asked directly if they had heard any noise while she was gone. If Ss said they did not, their response was categorized as denial.

Following this Ss were debriefed and an elaborate procedure was employed to reassure them. Ss were told that what they had heard was a taperecording and it was explained to them that E wanted to know what children of various ages thought when they heard another child crying. In order to provide Ss with an overall pleasant experience, the session ended with Ss playing games and/or engaging in a pleasant interaction with the Experimenter.

In the first experiment variation in helping behavior as a function of age and the number of children who witnessed the sounds of distress together was investigated. Kindergarten, first, second, fourth and sixth grade children heard the sounds of distress alone or in same-sex pairs. The procedure deviated from the general procedure previously described only in one way. After E checked on the child in the adjoining room, she said on her return to the experimental room: "She's fine, she's playing now. I hope she won't climb on that chair again." Then E left the room. The reason for this comment was to give S an idea what the source of the distress child's distressed may be. The distress sounds, which were produced by a 7-year-old girl, consisted of severe crying and sobbing.

I will mention the findings only very briefly, since they were reported elsewhere (Staub and Feagans, 1969): however, some of these findings provided

the starting point of further studies. There was a significant interaction between the effects of age and number of children present on helping behavior ($F=2.69$, $df=24/136$, $p<.05$) (Figure 1). Among younger children, kindergarten through second grade, pairs tended to help more, while among older children, in fourth and sixth grade, the difference between individuals and pairs disappeared. Special analyses were also performed that corrected for the fact that twice as many children were present in pairs and therefore the probability of help by pairs would have been greater even without any social influence within pairs. The interaction reported above was found in these analyses again, ($F=4.93$, $df=4/16$, $p<.01$), with younger children helping more in pairs, but the difference at specific age levels was reduced in this analysis, and only in first grade did pairs help significantly more than individuals. Sounds of distress are likely to produce fear, stress, and discomfort. Among younger children the presence of another child may be expected to decrease stress and fear and the inhibition of action they produce. At a later age another person may become the source of potential criticism and disapproval, and his presence may itself inhibit action.

The finding most important from the standpoint of subsequent research was a curvilinear (quadratic) relationship between helping behavior and age ($F=13.10$, $df=1/136$, $p<.01$; Figure 1) Helping behavior increased from kindergarten to second grade, but then it decreased to sixth grade, and sixth graders helped about as much as kindergarten children did (Figure 1). This curvilinear relationship was found both in the total sample and in individuals and pairs separately, although helping by pairs reached a peak in first grade while helping by individuals reached a peak in fourth grade. The decline in helping with age was surprising; competence in interaction with the environment, and empathy, or the capacity to vicariously experience others' emotion (Flavell, et al., 1968) are both likely to increase with age, and we expected, therefore, that helping would increase with age. We tried to find reasons for the decline

in helping behavior in sixth grade by asking children questions about the reasons for their behavior. A number of children gave answers that suggested the reason. They said things like "I did not think I was supposed to go in there;" or "I thought somebody would get mad at me if I went into that room." When the experimenter asked who that would be, the Subject said "You." In general, the answers suggested that older children feared disapproval for behaving inappropriately.

We thought it was very important to investigate this interpretation of the reasons for a decline in helping behavior with age, because it has serious implications for our socialization practices. With increasing age, children come to behave according to rules and regulations, and when the rules of appropriate behavior are not known they may be inactive in order to avoid disapproval for possibly inappropriate behavior. This would suggest also that the socialization of children overemphasizes prohibitions, without sufficiently emphasizing the learning of responsibility for the welfare of others or without teaching children that under certain conditions the usual prohibitions do not apply.

If children fear disapproval for possibly inappropriate behavior, then information that communicates to them the permissibility of a behavior they would later need to perform in order to help a distressed other may be expected to increase their willingness to help. In a second experiment we varied information about the permissibility of going into the adjoining room from which the sounds of distress would later be heard. The Subjects were 7th grade boys and girls. They were asked to make a drawing, as were the children in the previous study. In one group E left the room after checking on the child in the adjoining room. In another group, after she returned from the adjoining room she said: "If you need some more drawing pencils, you may go into the other room and get some; there are some in there on the windowsill." This procedure resulted in significant differences in helping behavior between the two groups, with children

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who received permission to go into the other room helping significantly more often than those who did not receive permission (X^2=.41,df=1, $p < .05$ Table 1). Most of this difference was due to active helping; Ss in the permission group went into the other room more often. There was no difference between boys and girls. In the no permission group helping behavior was infrequent, as with 6th graders in the previous study. In the permission group, 50% of the children helped. However, the behavior of one of the girls in the permission group gave us a clue to a possible source of limitation on the helping behavior of children in this group. This girl sat for a fairly long time after the distress sounds began, leaning forward, hardly moving. I had already assumed that she would not do anything, because there was a tendency for children who actively helped to help fairly early after the onset of the distress sounds. Then suddenly she picked up one of the drawing pencils, pressed its edge against the table and broke it, did the same with the second one, then jumped up, and ran into the other room. The behavior of this girl suggested the possibility that some children perceived the permission as specific to getting drawing pencils when they needed them, not as a general unconditional permission to go into the adjoining room. Another possible limitation on helping behavior may have been due to the nature of the distress sounds. The distress sounds in this study were made by a seven year old girl and included crying, sobbing, calls for help, and information both about the reasons for the distress and the type of help needed. Following the distress sounds, when E asked questions about what happened and about reasons for their behavior, a few children mentioned some suspicion that the distress sounds were taperecorded. It is a tricky question what to think of this, because there is no way to decide when children on the basis of E's questions guess that what they heard was not real and give that reason as an explanation for their behavior. Nevertheless, we made a new tape,

aiming to make it sound even more authentic, with a victim who was about the subjects' age, a 7th grade girl. Then we conducted a second experiment, with 7th grade girls as Subjects. In this experiment we used the new distress sounds, attempted to give permission in a manner that would be perceived as unconditional permission, and included a third experimental group in which going into the adjoining room was prohibited. So we had now a no information group, a permission group, and a prohibition group. The procedure was similar to that of the previous study. Subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire, instead of making a drawing. In the no information group they were told nothing about going into the other room. In the permission group E told them, before she was leaving, that there were a number of games in the adjoining room, and when they finished their questionnaire, or if they wanted to take a break while they were working on it, they could go into the other room and try out some of these games. In the prohibition group Ss were told that the girl in the other room was filling out a questionnaire similar to theirs and that they should not go into that room because E did not want the two of them to talk to each other and influence each others' answers to the questions. What we found was simple and clear; with 11 Subjects in each group, 10 out of 11 helped in the permission group, 3 out of 11 helped in the no information group, and four out of 11 helped in the prohibition group (Table 2). Two of the four helpers in the prohibition group volunteered information upon E's return to the room; all other help was active help. Fisher exact tests showed that children in the permission group helped significantly more than those in either of the other two groups ($p < .004$ with no information; $p < .011$ with prohibition) while there was no difference in helping between the no information and prohibition groups. The findings suggest that lack of information functioned as a prohibition.

The findings support the hypothesis that children are inhibited from helping others by fear of disapproval. As suggested before, older children, who have learned to behave according to rules and regulations, may attempt to minimize

the possibility of disapproval through inaction when the rules of appropriate behavior are not known. It seems that Subjects were more concerned about not doing the wrong thing than they were about not helping someone, a child of their own age, who sounded as if she were in serious distress. Again, this suggests that socialization practices may not sufficiently emphasize responsibility for the welfare of others, or prescriptive rather than prohibitive norms and standards.

Learning to help others

Next, I would like to turn to research on the learning of helping behavior. One influence that may be expected to affect the probability of helping behavior is empathy, or the capacity to view events from the standpoint of another person and to vicariously experience others' emotions, including their distress. Another likely influence on the probability of helping behavior is skill in, or knowledge of, behavior necessary for helping others. Such skill or knowledge may decrease uncertainty and fear of doing the wrong thing or of not being able to help effectively. The two procedures that were employed in this experiment had bearing on both of these potential influences on helping behavior; they were role playing and induction or pointing out to children the positive consequences of helping behavior for the recipient of help.

In role playing pairs of children enacted a number of scenes in which one person needed help and another one provided help, and then exchanged roles. This procedure was expected to increase children's ability to take roles, to view events from a number of points of view. Specifically, by increasing children's ability to view someone else's distress both from the standpoint of the distressed person and from that of the potential helper, capacity for empathy with the distressed person may increase. Role playing also provides an opportunity for improvisation, practice and modeling of helping acts. Therefore, in addition to increasing empathy, role playing was expected to increase children's knowledge of and skill in performing helping acts.

As far as the second procedure, induction, is concerned, past research has demonstrated that parents' pointing out to children the negative consequences of their behavior for others tends to be associated with children's consideration for others in nursery school (Hoffman, 1963) and with the presence of indices of internalized morality such as guilt in 7th grade children (Hoffman and Saltzstein, 1967). In this study the positive consequences for others of helping behavior was pointed out to children. Like role playing, this was expected to increase children's ability to view distress, or at least the importance of helping behavior, from the standpoint of a distressed other. In addition, the well being of others is likely to be reinforcing for some children. For one thing, children often get reinforced for doing something for others that enhances their well being. For another thing, the experience of an association between others' and their own well being, when they get reinforced together with someone or when they get reinforced when someone, a parent for example, is in a good mood, is likely to make others' well being reinforcing for them. Hence, pointing out the connection between helping behavior and others' well being may increase the frequency of help.

The effects of treatments were evaluated both the day after the second treatment session and one week later; the effects of treatment on both helping another child in distress, and on another kind of prosocial behavior, sharing material possessions, was evaluated. Sharing behavior and helping behavior have a common property in that both demand some form of sacrifice from the actor, while benefitting the recipient.

The experiment had a 2x2x2 design, with role playing and no role playing, induction and no induction, and sex as the three variables. The subjects were kindergarten children, both boys and girls. In all treatment groups, the children were taken in pairs to the experimental room. In the role playing group situations were described to the children in which one person needed help and another helped him. Then one of them enacted the victim, while

the other one attempted to provide help. When the helper had exhausted his repertoire of helping acts for this type of situation, E suggested more, until all possible forms of help were enacted. Then Ss exchanged roles. Five such scenes were enacted, which included a child falling off a chair in a neighboring room, a child taking away blocks from another child, a child trying to carry a chair that was too heavy for him, and so on.

In the induction group E described the same situations, and the children and E enumerated possible forms of helping as a background for E describing the positive consequences of help for the recipient. The improved physical well being of the victim, eg., that he had stopped bleeding, that he now stands up instead of lying on the ground, etc., and his improved psychological well being, eg., that he feels less pain, feels happier, and so on, were both emphasized. In the role playing with induction group children enacted scenes as in the role playing group, and E continuously pointed out the positive consequences of these acts for the victim. In the control group pairs of children enacted scenes unrelated to helping, without exchanging roles.

In the first training session children had same-sex partners. In a second training session, two days after the first one, children received the same kind of training as in the first session, but with a partner of the opposite sex.

The day after the second training session half of the Ss participated in the specific posttest, that is, a test of their helping behavior, while the other half participated in a generalized posttest, a test of their sharing behavior. From five to seven days later children participated in a delayed posttest, always the one they had not experienced before. The procedure of the specific posttest was the same as the helping tests in the previous experiments. In the general posttest Ss interacted with E, then made a drawing and then received candy as a reward for their participation. After this E said: "I want to tell you that there is a poor child whose parents are sick and cannot

buy him anything for his birthday. If you want to leave some candy for this child so he will have a happy birthday you can put some candy for him into this box through this hole." E left and was absent for a while, so that S could decide about sharing and perform the sharing in her absence. Every aspect of the experiment -- the training, the specific and the general posttests -- was conducted by different experimenters, at different locations.

As before, scores were assigned to Ss' response to the distress sounds and analyses of variance were used to examine the effects of treatments. First, it may be mentioned that whatever effects treatments had they were enduring effects: overall Ss helped slightly more on the delayed than on the immediate posttest ($F=4.00$, $df=1/51$, $p<.06$). The findings were complex; a three-way interaction was found between role playing, induction and sex ($F=5.40$, $df=1/63$, $p<.025$). Comparisons between means showed that role playing increased girls' helping behavior in comparison to the control group ($t=2.17$, $df=63$, $p<.05$; Table 3); there was a numerical increase in girls' helping behavior in the induction group, and in boys' helping behavior in the role playing with induction group, but these were not significant in comparison to the control group. In the role playing group girls helped more than boys ($t=3.04$, $df=63$, $p<.01$), while in the role playing with induction group boys helped slightly more than girls ($t=1.73$, $df=63$, $p<.10$).

Analyses of variance were performed to examine candy sharing also. In the role playing group the effect of treatment on boys was greater on the delayed than on the immediate posttest, while in the other groups there was no difference: again, treatments had enduring effects. Once again, a significant three-way interaction was found between role playing, induction, and sex ($F=6.29$, $df=1/63$, $p<.02$) and a significant two-way interaction between role playing and sex ($F=4.05$, $df=1/63$, $p<.05$). Comparisons between means showed that role playing significantly increased boys' sharing of candy ($t=3.23$, $df=63$, $p<.01$ Table 4) while induction had a marginally significant effect ($t=1.78$, $df=63$, $p<.10$).

Differences in girls' sharing behavior between treatment groups were not significant.

Role playing significantly increased girls helping another child in distress and boys' sharing of candy with a needy other. In general, while the findings were complex, whatever effects treatments had they were enduring, and at least for boys the effects of treatments generalized to sharing behavior. The fact that only boys' and not girls' sharing behavior increased may be due either to differential propensities by them toward sharing, or to the fact that the supposed recipient of the shared candy was a boy. On the other hand, the effects of treatments were greater on girls' than on boys' helping behavior, which again may be due either to differential propensities toward helping or to the fact that the distress child was a girl.

The significant increase in boys' sharing behavior suggests that a general process of some kind may have been influenced by treatments. Empathy for persons in need may have been increased by role playing, for example. However, certain additional findings suggest that this generalized effect has specific components. Among boys, although not among girls, there was a moderately strong relationship between increase from the first to the second training session in the number of helping acts children performed in the first helping scene and indices of prosocial behavior on the posttest ($r=.56$, $df=13$, $p<.05$ with helping; $r=.46$, $df=13$, $p<.10$ with sharing).

Previous research findings, for example those in the early research of Hartshorne and May (1929) showed that experiences which have been regarded as part of "moral education," such as participation in Sunday School and Boys Scout activities, did not enhance children's "moral" behavior as measured by cheating and resistance to temptation. The present research dealt with behavior that involves assuming responsibility for the welfare of others, that is, positive acts that are prescribed by societal norms, rather than behavior that involves adherence to inhibitions that proscribe certain behaviors. The findings suggest that highly specific training procedures, particularly role playing

specific situations, may enhance the subsequent probability of prosocial behavior, and that such procedures may be used in educational settings to enhance children's learning of prosocial behavior.

Table 1

Frequency of Active Help, Volunteering and
No Help in the Permission and No-permission Groups

	Active Help	Volunteering	No Help
Permission	8	2	10
No-permission	3	0	17

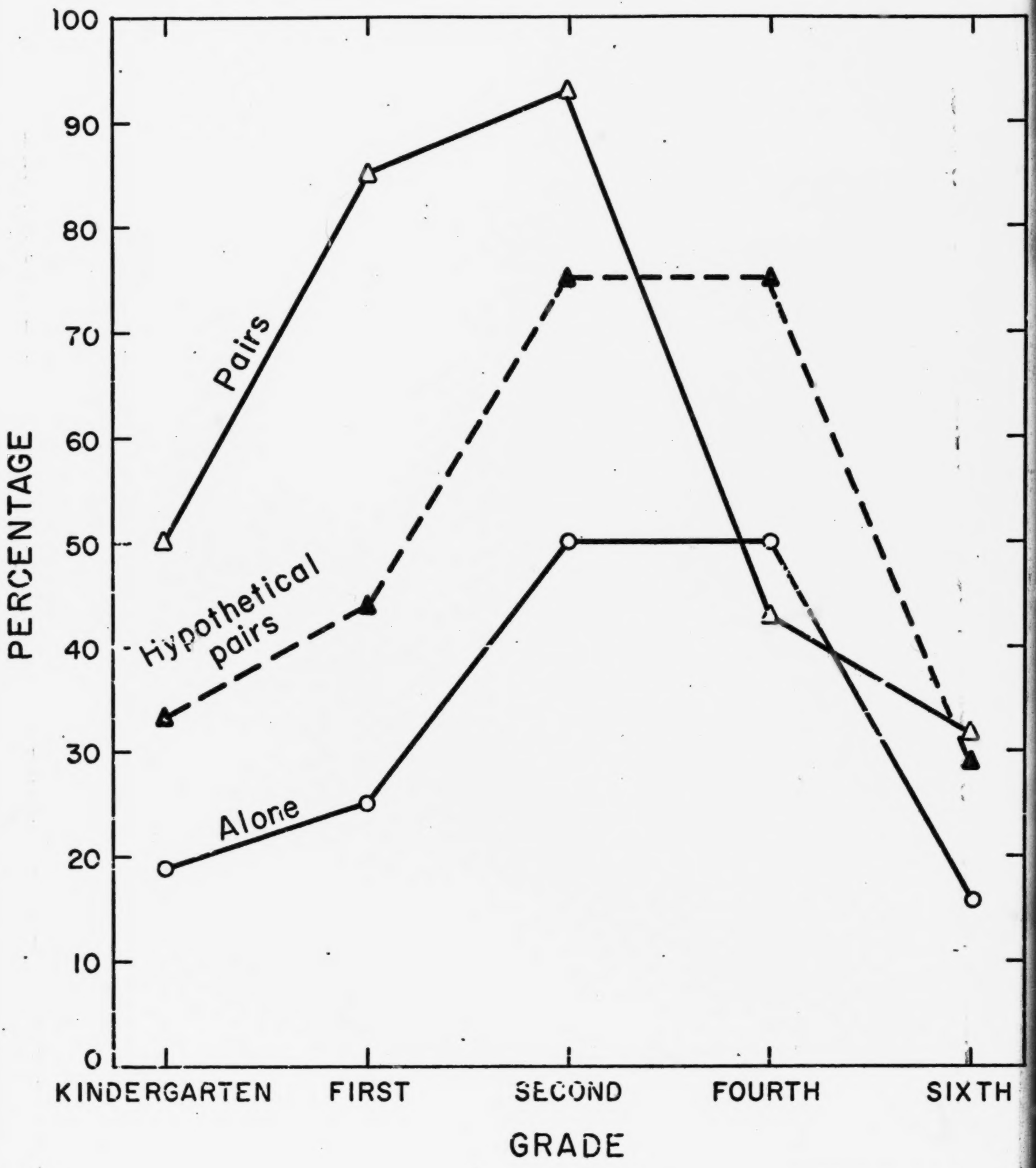
Table 2

Frequency of Active Help, Volunteering and No Help
in the Permission, No-permission, and Prohibition Groups

	Active Help	Volunteering	No Help
Permission	10	0	1
No-permission	3	0	8
Prohibition	2	2	7

Figure 1

Percentage of help at each grade level (active help and volunteering information combined) by individuals, pairs, and hypothetical pairs.*



*Percentages of hypothetical pairs were derived on the basis of individuals' helping behavior (See text and footnote 6).

Table 3

Mean Helping Scores

		Induction	No Induction
Role Playing	Boys	1.67 (n=7)	1.00 (n=8)
	Girls	1.07 (n=10)	1.83 (n=10)
No Role Playing	Boys	1.25 (n=8)	1.13 (n=8)
	Girls	1.57 (n=9)	1.27 (n=11)

Table 4

Mean Sharing of Candy

		Induction	No Induction
Role Playing	Boys	2.43 (n=7)	5.13 (n=8)
	Girls	1.57 (n-10)	1.50 (n=10)
No Role Playing	Boys	3.38 (n=8)	1.25 (n=8)
	Girls	1.86 (n=9)	2.81 (n=11)

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